

Biodiversity



Number 31

Wharangi (*Melicope ternata*)

DESCRIPTION

Wharangi is a coastal shrub or small tree which can grow up to 8m tall with a trunk up to 20cm in diameter. It is a member of the Rutaceae family, to which citrus and rue also belong. Rutaceae species are known for the oil glands contained in their leaves, which make them aromatic. The leaves of wharangi emit a pleasant scent when crushed.

The glossy, lime green leaves are arranged in opposite pairs with a stalk about 5cm long. The leaves are compound, with three smooth-margined leaflets. The small yellowish green scented flowers form in clusters at the branch tips in early spring. The fruits are dry brown capsules, each with four small pods containing one black shiny seed. These form in late spring to late summer and are eaten and dispersed by birds. Wharangi is slightly frost tender.

DISTRIBUTION

Wharangi is endemic to New Zealand. It grows naturally on Raoul Island in the Kermadec group, the Three Kings Islands, and in the North Island and the northern South Island. Wharangi is a coastal plant, though it will grow in the lowland zone (up to about 300m above sea level) in warmer parts of New Zealand.

WHARANGI IN TARANAKI

Wharangi is uncommon in Taranaki. It is typically found growing in higher light areas on the margins of coastal forest where it receives shelter and protection from the adjacent forest.

Historically, it has been recorded growing along the northern Taranaki coast from the Mohakatino River mouth in the north to the Kaitake Ranges, where it has been found growing at 110m above sea level.

Wharangi has also been recorded growing at Waitotara, its southernmost population in Taranaki. There are no records of it elsewhere along the South Taranaki coast.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

- Fence off areas of scrub and forest to prevent browsing by cattle, sheep and wild animals.
- When planting wharangi, ensure plant material is eco-sourced to preserve our local form.



CONSERVATION

Wharangi is not a threatened or endangered plant. It is recognized as being regionally uncommon in the Taranaki region.

THREATS

- Vegetation clearance.
- Trampling and browsing by domestic and feral cattle, goats, sheep, pigs and possums.

QUICK FACTS

- The gum of the wharangi has traditionally been used as a fragrance when making hair oil, pomades etc.
- The gum is also edible and has traditionally been used as a breath freshener.
- The timber has been used for inlaying work in cabinetmaking.



Seed capsule of wharangi showing shiny black seeds



Taranaki Regional Council

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